

South Florida Ecosystem at a Crossroad --- the Time to Act is Now

If we are to rescue the south Florida ecosystem and its Everglades, perhaps the first question we must answer is why. The answers to this question are overwhelming. The Everglades are to south Florida as the Rockies are to the western states, the old growth forests are to the Pacific northwest, the Adirondack, White and Green Mountains are to the northeast, and the Mississippi River is to the nation's heartland. The Everglades epitomize the region's sense of definition and place, both substantially by providing clean water and recreation, and spiritually by providing a sense of hope for the quality of the region's future. The Everglades are unlike any other place in the world. They attract the eyes of the world.

At the end of Marjory Stoneman Douglas' book, The Everglades: River of Grass, she eloquently charges us with our responsibility for the Everglades.

It is an article of faith in Florida, in the emerging urban giant carved from wild dunes and inaccessible swamps, that events can be propelled fast enough to keep ahead of consequences. A century after man first started to dominate the Everglades, that progress has stumbled. Consequences have started to catch up. It is, perhaps, an opportunity. The great wet wilderness of South Florida need not be degraded to a permanent state of mediocrity. If the people will it, if they enforce their will on the managers of Florida's future, the Everglades can be restored to nature's design.

Unfortunately, 50 years after Mrs. Douglas wrote that the consequences of our actions have started to catch up with the Everglades, we have failed to act in a comprehensive fashion to reverse this trend. No longer "fast enough to keep ahead of consequences," the Everglades and the south Florida ecosystem must be restored now or the future of south Florida will be irrevocably hurt. A national treasure will be lost.

We are indeed at an important crossroad in our efforts to restore this internationally important ecosystem. The solution is there for the taking. The Comprehensive Plan is a bold roadmap for success. If we act now with courage and vision to implement this technically sound plan, we will be successful and we will leave a proud Everglades legacy. If we fail to act, our legacy will be one of lost opportunities for all future generations. The world is indeed watching as we make this choice.

Perhaps, even in this last hour, in a new relation of usefulness and beauty, the vast, magnificent, subtle and unique region of the Everglades may not be utterly lost.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas,
The Everglades: River of Grass



Dear Kids,

Thanks for sending along your letters and pictures asking us to save the Everglades. Many, many people have been working very hard with us to do just that.

Saving the Everglades is a lot like taking a big test. Both are very important and very hard things to do. We've asked people who live in south Florida and experts from around the world to help us figure this out. It's not surprising that we don't all agree on exactly what we should do. And we're still not exactly sure how it will turn out no matter what gets done.

But we are sure that if we don't do anything there won't be much of an Everglades for you to show to your children. They may not get to see those tall white birds flying across the sky. They may never have the chance to be scared when an alligator pops up on a visit to the Park. Even worse, they may not even be able to live here if there's not enough water to drink. None of us want to give you a future like that. And so, we're sure we need to do something.

People gave us a lot of different ideas about what we should do to save the Everglades. We looked into all of them and came up with what we think is a pretty fair plan to do just that. It's going to cost a lot of money and take a long time. Even so, we think our plan is headed in the right direction. It's a very big idea to make some very big and important differences in your future.

We hope you'll be able to spend long quiet hours in the sun fishing on Lake Okeechobee. We hope you'll always find a tall glass of cool clean water on those hot Florida days. We hope you'll feel the sting of sawgrass when you take an airboat ride from the Tamiami Trail. We hope you'll sleep soundly and feel safe even when the thunderstorms bring the hardest of rains. We hope you'll swim in silence with sea turtles in Florida Bay. And we hope you'll stay and live in Clewiston, or Fort Myers, or Port St. Lucie, or Miami, or Marathon, or wherever life takes you here in south Florida. Our moms and dads gave us these things. We want you to be able to give at least that much to your children.

We're taking a first step in passing these hopes on to all of you. We've hung your drawings on our walls as a reminder of what you asked us to do for you.

The Reedy Team

Acknowledgements

Much of the information in this document was drawn from the *Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study, Final Integrated Feasibility Report and Programmatic Impact Statement*, dated April 1999. Other sources were also used and are listed below with grateful acknowledgement.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas. *The Everglades: River of Grass*. Pineapple Press, Sarasota, Florida. Revised Edition, 1988.

U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District, and South Florida Water Management District. *Overview: Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study*. October, 1998.

Working Group of the South Florida Ecosystem Task Force. *Success in the Making: An Integrated Plan for South Florida Ecosystem Restoration and Sustainability*. October, 1998.

For more information or to obtain a copy of the Plan, please contact:



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The Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study was led by the U S Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District and the South Florida Water Management District, located in West Palm Beach, Florida. Many other federal, state, tribal and local agencies were active partners in developing the Comprehensive Plan and that partnership will continue through the implementation of the Plan. Those agencies are listed below.

US Department of the Army

US Army Corps of Engineers
Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works

US Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Research Service
Natural Resources Conservation Service

US Department of the Interior

US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Geological Survey/Biological Resources Division
Everglades National Park
Everglades Research and Education Center
Biscayne National Park
Big Cypress National Preserve

US Department of Commerce

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
National Ocean Service
Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research

US Environmental Protection Agency

Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida

Seminole Tribe of Florida

State of Florida

Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Department of Environmental Protection
Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission
Governors Commission for a Sustainable South Florida
Governor's Office
South Florida Water Management District

Local Agencies

Broward County Department of Natural Resource Protection
Broward County Office of Environmental Services

Lee County Utility Department

Martin County

Miami-Dade Department of Environmental
Resource Management
Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department

Palm Beach County Environmental Resource Management
Palm Beach County Water Utilities

Academic Institutions

Florida International University
University of Miami
University of Tennessee

“The Everglades are an American treasure, and saving them must be a national priority. In close partnership with the state of Florida, we already are hard at work restoring this extraordinary landscape. Now we must take the critical next step. By capturing precious freshwater that now flows to the sea, our Comprehensive Plan ensures both a strong, sustainable economy, and a healthy Everglades for generations to come.”

Vice President Al Gore
June 18, 1999

“We must act now.....

.....if we are to reverse the course of 50 years of degradation and restore the Everglades. The Comprehensive Plan is a science-based and technically sound roadmap for restoring this ecosystem of international importance. It is flexible and will allow for adjustments as we learn more. In fact, it anticipates that such adjustments will have to be made. The ecosystem cannot wait for us to have all the answers and what we think is a perfect plan. We will never have all the answers and a perfect plan. If we become paralyzed by this desire and fail to act now, we miss what is very likely our last golden opportunity to restore this resource for the generations to come.”

Nathaniel Reed April 7, 1999

Florida Environmentalist and former Assistant Secretary of the Interior,
Fish, Wildlife and Parks



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